

The book, which is handsomely produced, should be bought, read, and digested by all those who are responsible for the management of hand injuries and disabilities.

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Expert Committee on Medical Rehabilitation. First Report. [*Wld Hlh Org. techn. Rep. Ser. No. 158.*] (Pp. 52. 3s. 6d.) London: H.M.S.O.; Geneva: W.H.O. 1958.

The first session of the Expert Committee on Medical Rehabilitation was held in Geneva in the early part of 1958. The members of this Committee were Dr. F. S. Cooksey (England), Dr. G. Harlem (Oslo), Dr. H. H. Kessler (U.S.A.), Dr. M. Maurer (Rumania), Dr. E. Mindus (Sweden), Dr. F. E. de Godoy Moreira (Brazil), Professor J. Parisot (France), and Dr. R. Soeharso (Indonesia), together with representatives from the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the World Health Organization Secretariat.

Owing to the large field to be covered and the complexity of the subject, the Committee confined itself to discussing general principles and practices. It was agreed that medical rehabilitation was the fourth place in the whole scheme of health measures applicable to an individual or community, the others being promotion of health and prevention and treatment of disease: later on in their report, however, the point is made that good treatment includes all that is understood by rehabilitation and this is more in accord with present day ideas. As severely disabled people more frequently survive nowadays, due to advances in medical science, rehabilitation problems tend to increase and the many services concerned in the rehabilitation process demand good team work if success is to be attained. Some striking examples are given of how rehabilitation services have reduced the amount of invalidism in some countries and eased the burden of State payments to the disabled. The general aims and principles of rehabilitation are wisely defined but perhaps more stress might have been placed on the need of the patient himself cultivating a right attitude of mind towards recovery.

Particularly valuable sections of the report deal with the coordination of rehabilitation services and the education and training of medical and other persons working in this field. The expansion of the social services in recent years has greatly increased the doctor's responsibility and potential usefulness, and it is essential that medical students should fully understand this, and often have fuller instruction in the principles and practice of rehabilitation; there is also need of better postgraduate education in these matters. The report goes on to outline the help that relatives, employers, and fellow workers should give to those with disabilities, but rightly stresses the doctor's duty to be well informed of rehabilitation techniques, to teach, and to lead the rehabilitation team.

In some appendices to their report the authors discuss the psychological aspects of rehabilitation, rehabilitation in some less developed countries and some special problems of the blind, deaf, and chronically ill, and end with some recommendations for further study and action. They consider that while the techniques for rehabilitating those with orthopaedic and special senses handicaps have been well developed, more attention should now be paid to

medical disabilities such as those due to circulatory, respiratory, and digestive disorders. They urge that thought should be given by the appropriate international organizations to the meaning of words such as "disability" and "impairment" and agreement sought regarding terminology. The extent of the rehabilitation problem should be studied by means of field surveys in individual countries, and where social security systems have been well developed these should be better coordinated with the machinery of rehabilitation. Good collaboration between government departments dealing with this subject on a national level is advocated, and the need is stressed of suitable training for all persons concerned in this work.

T. G. FAULKNER HUDSON

Ageing and Human Skill. By A. T. Welford. (Pp. viii + 300; illustrated. 25s.) Published for the Nuffield Foundation by Oxford University Press, London. 1958.

This book is an account of the research carried out by the Nuffield Unit for Research into Problems of Ageing from 1946 to 1956. It extends and deepens the pioneer work on human performance started by Bartlett and Craik during the last war. Perhaps a better title would have been "Ageing and Performance" because the research has covered a much wider field than that customarily denoted by the term "skill". Perception, problem solving, memory, adaptability, as well as motor skill, are some of the areas in which studies have been carried out.

The bulk of the work is experimental and the experiments are distinguished by the ingenuity with which they have been designed to examine fundamental problems but, at the same time, to preserve some analogy to tasks met outside the laboratory. The strategy of research may be taken as a model of what research should be. Rather general questions are asked first of all and then more precise information is gained by the use of additional controls. Although the investigations explore very different aspects of behaviour, they are unified through their interpretation by information theory concepts. The explanatory power and fruitfulness of this approach to psychological phenomena cannot be fully appreciated until the attempt is made to account for some of the more interesting findings in terms of stimulus-response learning theory.

The author's main conclusion is that changes in performance with age are due not so much to impairment in receptor and effector organs as to failure of central mechanisms to guide and control appropriate action. This failure is discussed in terms of "diminished channel capacity", "lowering of signal to noise ratio", and "lessened short-term storage of information". It is further suggested that the organic correlate of this failure may be found in the decrease in the number of active brain cells associated with increasing age. However, evidence is also adduced to show that older people compensate to some extent by an automatic adjustment of their activity to a level appropriate to their capacity.

The presentation strikes a reasonable balance between the detailed research paper and the semi-popular and inevitably over-simplified summary of results. And this should make the book suitable for industrial medical